

# House Education & the Workforce Committee

**John Boehner, Chairman**

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# ISSUE SUMMARY

## H.R. 1 Helps Close the Achievement Gap

Today, nearly 70 percent of inner city and rural fourth-graders cannot read at a basic level; low-income students lag behind their counterparts by an average of 20 percentile points on national assessment tests. Since 1990, Congress has spent more than \$80 billion on the Title I program to help disadvantaged students, but achievement scores remain generally stagnant. The academic achievement gap between rich and poor, Anglo and minority remains wide, and in some cases is growing wider.

According to a recent National Education Goal Panel report, only two states, Georgia and Massachusetts, reduced the reading achievement gap between white students and black or Hispanic students. On average, whites scored 33 points ahead of blacks and 29 points ahead of Hispanics. (Generally speaking, 10 points equals what a student learned in one grade.) Within ethnic groups, the achievement gap between the best and worst readers has also widened. For example, as reported in the *Wall Street Journal*, “the best-performing black children scored 99 points better than the worst-performing blacks,” compared to an 86-point difference roughly eight years ago.

Robert Kennedy once called the achievement gap between disadvantaged students and their peers “a stain on our national honor.” The achievement gap cannot stand. We have a moral obligation to bring real change to 35 years of failed education policies -- and to pass this bill for our children’s future.

**President Bush’s *No Child Left Behind* education reform plan focuses on closing the achievement gap between disadvantaged students and their more affluent peers.**

H.R. 1 refocuses federal education spending back toward its original goal of helping America’s disadvantaged students. Specifically, it:

- **Increases Accountability for Student Performance:** The measure establishes a rigorous system of rewards and sanctions for states and school districts to hold them accountable for increasing student achievement. Schools will be held accountable for their effectiveness through annual state reading and math assessments in grades three through eight.
- **Establishes Rewards and Sanctions:** H.R. 1 authorizes states to provide rewards to schools (and teachers in such schools) that substantially close the achievement gap between the lowest and highest performing students. Sanctions will be based on a state’s failure to narrow the achievement gap in meeting adequate yearly progress requirements in math and reading in grades three through eight.
- **Reduces Bureaucracy and Increases Flexibility:** H.R. 1 provides additional flexibility to states and school districts to tailor spending to programs that meet the unique needs of students and eliminate programs that divert resources from schools.

- **Focuses on What Works:** The bill requires federal dollars to be spent on effective, research-based programs and practices and it targets funds to improve schools and enhance teacher quality.
- **Empowers Parents:** H.R. 1 requires states and school districts to prepare annual report cards on their schools to better inform parents about the quality of their child's school. Moreover, it allows parents to remove their child from a low-performing school and sending them to a different public school after one year or a private school after three years of chronic failure.